News release

Radlett School goes up, up and away with the Met Office

29 May 2002

Radlett Prep School, Hertfordshire, has won the Met Office Balloon Challenge in England for 'the furthest travelling balloon' in a Science Week experiment. The school's helium balloon travelled all the way to Bundorf in Germany - right in line with the Met Office's predicted flight path.

As part of Science Week, 126 schools across the UK released biodegradable, helium-filled balloons in the Met Office Balloon Challenge - an experiment conducted to help demonstrate air molecule dispersion to children. The helium balloons simulated air molecules and the children used atmospheric forecast data on the Met Office web site to predict where their balloons would eventually land. The Met Office used its NAME model, which is used to predict air molecule dispersion, to determine that the balloons would take a flight path over south-east Germany.

Pupils at Radlett Prep School with their prize - a Met Office umbrella

Mr Warren, Principal at Radlett Prep School, said: "We predicted that the balloons we released would land in Germany, so are delighted that our prediction was accurate and that somebody took the trouble to send the tag back to the Met Office."

Jacquie Syvret, Met Office Education Development Manager, said: "As well as being one of the world's leading providers of environmental and weather-related services, the Met Office works to bring science alive for people of all ages. It's great that the school's balloon landed right on the flight path predicted by our sophisticated equipment. Thanks to a very simple experiment, schools have gained a valuable insight into the science employed every day at the Met Office to prepare weather forecasts".

Editors' notes:

The Met Office's atmospheric dispersion model was run from five sites for the Balloon Challenge; Leeming, Watnall, Boscombe Down, Aberporth and Glasgow. Each school returned its prediction sheets, which were then compared with the model's output closest to each school's address. Schools were asked to release their balloons as close to 1330 hrs as possible and assume the balloon stayed in the air for 12 hours before landing.

Although the balloon challenge event has passed, the worksheets containing background information and activities related to the wind are still available on the Met Office education pages .

The Met Office Education Service provides an educational range of products and services to teachers and schools, including weather focused activities and education web pages. The web pages help teachers and pupils to extend their knowledge of weather and climate in the UK and around the world.

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